

Evil and Human Nature.

by Roy W. Perrett

One familiar philosophical use of the term `evil' just contrasts it with `good', i.e., something is an evil if it is a bad thing, one of life's "minuses." This is the sense of `evil' that is used in posing the traditional theological problem of evil, though it is customary there to distinguish between moral evils and natural evils. Moral evils are those bad things (like war and crimes) that are caused by moral agents; natural evils are those bad things (like earthquakes and disease) that are not caused by moral agents. Since the existence of evils of both sorts is usually taken to be indubitable, the problem of evil is then construed as the problem of how to square their existence with the existence of an all-powerful and benevolent God. Ordinary English usage, however, tends to reserve the term `evil' for what is morally sinister. Moreover, even the ready admission that there are moral evils in the sense distinguished above (i.e., bad things caused by moral agents) does not quite seem to capture what many people have in mind when they talk of evil. Evil is instead often understood to be a very special moral category: it involves not just wrongdoing, but a special kind of intentional wrongdoing in which at least the following four features need to be present. Firstly, in order to be evil the wrongdoing must flow from a particular kind of character. Secondly, the wrongdoing must be motivated in a particular way: it must be a wrongdoing which is done because it is wrong. Thirdly, the agent will take pleasure in the wrongness of the action. Finally, the agent will fail to exhibit the morally appropriate reactive attitudes (guilt, shame, regret, etc.) to her wrongdoing. To make it clear when I am talking of this special category of wrongdoing, rather than of just ordinary moral and natural evil, I shall henceforth refer to it by the capitalised `Evil'.

It is clear, then, that Evil is supposed to be something much more profoundly wicked than ordinary wrongdoing, something to which "a whiff of brimstone" attaches. Indeed some take talk of Evil as nothing but an inclination to demonise severe moral transgressions and are correspondingly sceptical about the very intelligibility of the concept outside of a theological context. Is the concept of Evil coherent? Is it required in order to explain the occurrence of moral evil? Is it compatible with a plausible theory of human nature? To try to answer such questions I need first to say a bit more about the four features of Evil I have already mentioned.

Firstly, I take **Evil** to be a character-based notion: in order to be **Evil** a wicked action has to flow from a particular kind of depraved character; it is the presence of such a character that explains the occurrence of **Evil** actions. (1) But the **Evil** character's disposition to do wrong cannot be defined externally in terms of a disposition to cause unjustified harm to others, for such a character would still be **Evil** even if incapacity or luck prevented her actually causing harm to others. Rather, the **Evil** character desires to do wrong precisely because it is wrong, taking pleasure in the fact that her wrong actions are wrong.

A locus classicus for this notion of **Evil** is Book II of Augustine's Confessions. Augustine recalls his childhood theft of a load of pears, not to eat, but merely for the pleasure of the theft:

Wickedness filled me. I stole something which I had in plenty and of much better quality. My desire was to enjoy not what I sought by stealing but merely the excitement of thieving and the doing of what was wrong.... Even if we ate a few, nevertheless our pleasure lay in doing what was not allowed I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul and I loved it. (2)

Augustine's account here exhibits all four features of the concept of **Evil**: his primary motivation is to do wrong for the sake of doing wrong; he takes a malevolent pleasure in that motivation; he fails to feel appropriate remorse for doing so; and the ultimate explanation of all this is in terms of a particular sort of character (in this case, one with a disposition towards original sin). It is very interesting, moreover, to note just how close Augustine's conception of **Evil** is to at least one modern common-sense conception of **Evil**. The psychologist Fred Alford's What **Evil** Means to Us is based on interviews with fifty-eight informants, including eighteen prison inmates at Patuxent Institution, most serving long sentences for murder. Here is his report about what they had to say about what **evil** is:

"**Evil** is pleasure in hurting and a lack of remorse." Not only most prisoners say this; most informants do. But prisoners find more comfort in the description than others, because most inmates believe that they have done **evil** but do not want to be **evil**. "I killed this

guy, but I didn't get
any pleasure in it, you know". (3)

Of course, Augustine, too, stresses the moral significance of the pleasure he took in his wickedness. He is careful, however, to indicate that, while the pleasure he took in doing wrong was an important feature of his **Evil**, this pleasure was not his primary motivation for doing wrong. Instead what he says is that he recognised that what he was doing was wrong and for that reason wanted to do it. In other words, the pleasure he felt in so acting was independent of his motivation to act; indeed the content of that pleasure presupposed that his primary reason for acting was his recognition that what he was doing was wrong. Augustine thus positions himself firmly on one side of a well-known debate about the explanation of **evil**. There are two major lines of thought here. Some (including Hutcheson and Butler) hold that the existence of **evil** is not best explained by an appeal to **Evil**, since agents do not directly choose **evil**, but rather just pursue their own interests and desires at the expense of others. Others (including Augustine) hold that agents sometimes do choose **evil** for its own sake, with a familiar theological version of this line explaining that this occurs because people have a fallen **nature** such that they will inevitably choose **evil** unless prevented. (It is the association of the notion of **Evil** with this theological tradition that has perhaps led some to be sceptical about the very intelligibility of the concept outside of the theological context.)

Prima facie there is something of a tension between this conception of **Evil** and certain views about the connection between moral judgment and motivation. Indeed some have objected that, if the concept of **Evil** requires that the agent is motivated to act by her recognition that her act is morally wrong, then the concept is uninstantiated. Others have argued instead that the existence of **Evil** shows that certain views about the relation between moral judgement and motivation are mistaken. These contrasting positions depend, of course, on which side of the internalism/ externalism debate in ethics the objector is on.

Moral externalism is the view that there exists no necessary connection between moral judgement and motivation; an agent can both recognise something is the morally right thing for her to do and yet not be motivated to do it. Moral internalism is the view that there is a conceptual connection between moral judgement and the will. Strong internalism is the view that moral judgement brings motivation with it simpliciter: i.e., if an agent recognises something is the morally right thing for her to do, then she is automatically motivated to do it. Weak internalism is the view there is a defeasible

connection between moral judgement and motivation: i.e., if an agent recognises something is the morally right thing for her to do, then either she is automatically motivated to do it or she is practically irrational.

It is clear that externalism is logically compatible with the existence of Evil. But the existence of Evil is problematic for both kinds of internalism. Strong internalism is straightforwardly inconsistent with the existence of Evil since it is precisely the Evil agent's recognition that something is morally wrong that motivates her to do it.

Accordingly, some externalists argue that since Evil obviously does exist, internalism must be false. (4) Internalists, on the other hand, sometimes reply that they are sceptical that agents ever do choose wickedness simply because it is wickedness. Supposed cases of this kind of Evil--like Milton's Satan, whose motto is "Evil be thou my good"--are better described as embracing wickedness, not for its own sake, but in order to pursue other goals. (5)

It seems to me unacceptably ad hoc to defend internalism by ruling out of court the possibility of an agent being motivated to action by the very recognition that her action is wicked. After all, there do at least seem to be intelligible examples of such Evil characters in fiction, one much discussed one being Claggart in Melville's Billy Budd. (6) But neither does the existence of Evil necessarily refute internalism. To be sure, strong internalism is incompatible with the existence of Evil; but then strong internalism already seems implausible, leaving no room for akrasia. Weak internalism, however, is logically compatible with the existence of Evil, provided that the Evil agent is practically irrational.

This concession to the externalist raises, though, a different difficulty. If we accept weak internalism, then Evil is an irrational phenomenon. Insofar as there is an implausibility in the idea that a kind of agency can be both systematically irrational and widespread, then weak internalism seems to imply that Evil must be uncommon even if it is possible. In other words, the many moral evils of the world are not generally explicable in terms of Evil.

This claim is in line with much popular talk about "the banality of evil," where that phrase is taken to mean that most moral evil is the result of casual thoughtlessness and meanness, rather than Evil. (7)

The idea here is not that Evil is nonexistent: there may indeed be moral monsters properly described as "Evil". But such demonic creatures are extremely rare in real life (it is no accident that the most uncontroversial exemplars of the Evil character-type are fictional creatures like Claggart or Iago). Real-life moral evil is most typically caused not by agents directly choosing evil, but rather just as the result of agents unrestrictedly pursuing their own interests

and desires at the expense of others. Of course, many people, including ourselves, are often guilty of moral evil in this way. But, although we all freely concede the existence of such evil, we do not usually identify the agents involved as Evil. Instead, there is a widespread modern tendency to think that a better acquaintance with agents' circumstances and motivations will reveal complexities that will prevent us from judging them to be Evil. In other words, the modern tendency is to reject the claim that evil actions are best explained by positing the existence of Evil.

John Kekes calls this reluctance to allow evil actions to count as evidence for their agents' being evil "the soft reaction to evil," contrasting it with "the hard reaction" that he prefers. (8) According to the hard reaction, the prevalence of evil is inexplicable without reference to the existence of evil characters. Whereas the soft reaction tends to explain evil in terms of the corruption of our native human disposition to goodness, the hard reaction takes our disposition to do evil to be an integral part of human nature. This disagreement involves, then, conflicting views about human nature. I have argued that there is no reason to suppose that the concept of Evil is incoherent, since there seem at least to be plausible fictional exemplars of it. Moreover, the concept of Evil is compatible not only with externalism, but also with the most plausible version of internalism. To be sure, accepting weak internalism implies that Evil is irrational and hence presumably relatively rare. But this fits in well with the soft reaction to evil: Evil may well exist, but it is not the best explanation of the usual instances of moral evil we encounter every day. The idea that such everyday evils are only explicable in terms of Evil will then be judged incompatible with the most plausible theory of human nature: normal humans are not such that, on an everyday basis, they irrationally opt to do what they believe to be wrong because it is wrong. The hard reaction to evil, in contrast, claims that the very prevalence of everyday evils is only explicable on a rather more pessimistic view of human nature.

III

We can identify five distinct positions about the relation of evil to human nature, each of which seems to have different implications for the explicability of moral evil in terms of Evil:

- (1) Optimism: Human nature is primarily good.
- (2) Pessimism: Human nature is primarily evil.
- (3) Dualism: Human nature is both good and evil.
- (4) Neutralism: Human nature is neither good nor evil.
- (5) Individualism: There is no such thing as human nature, only individuals are good or evil. (9)

Of these five positions, not all are equally serious candidates for our belief. We should dismiss rather swiftly both neutralism and individualism. Neutralism is implausible because it is surely true that we all do have some native dispositions, and acting upon them often will cause **evil** to others. Individualism is implausible because, as members of the same species, we all do share some of our innate dispositions. Hence it is false that we only have primary potentials *qua* individuals, and not *qua* **human** beings.

The more serious options are the remaining three positions. The first of these is optimism, which views **evil** actions as signs of a corruption of our primary potential for good. Optimism has a venerable intellectual history, numbering among its advocates Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza, as well as many moderns. It holds that **human** beings are naturally predisposed to do good, but internal or external conditions can prevent this innate propensity from being realised. Our ignorance and weakness, which may have external social causes as well as internal ones, are what usually account for the **evil** we do, not any deeper **Evil** that is an essential part of **human nature**. Of course, this explanation of **evil** is still compatible with the concession that some **evil** actions might be caused by **Evil**. However, since claims about **human nature** are claims about normal **human** propensities, **Evil** must be exceptional even though **evil** is not. Optimism thus fits well with both internalism and the soft reaction to **evil**.

The second position is pessimism, which is just the reverse of optimism. According to pessimism, our primary potential is for **evil** and we act evilly whenever we fail to control our natural impulses. The Hobbesian picture of humans in a state of **nature** has been influential here: left to their own devices, it is suggested, humans will tend unrestrictedly to pursue their own desires at the sake of others'. Confronted with apparent counter-examples of altruistic behaviour, pessimists respond that such behaviour just shows that sometimes civilisation can manage to overpower our animal instincts.

Unlike optimism, pessimism is difficult to reconcile with internalism. It is, however, perfectly compatible with the soft reaction to **evil**. After all, insofar as pessimism appeals to the supposed naturalness of egoistic selfishness in order to explain **evil**, the theory requires no more recourse to **Evil** to explain **evil** than does optimism. Once again, it may be true that some **evil** actions might be caused by **Evil**. According to pessimism, however, **evil** is normally best explained by natural facts about selfish agents pursuing their own interests and desires at the expense of others, rather than by positing agents directly choosing **evil** for the sake of **evil**.

The third position is dualism, according to which **human nature** is a mix of primary potentials predisposing us in opposite directions. We do **evil** because the good part of our **nature** does not sufficiently dominate the bad. This was the Manichaeian view, but due to Christian influence it fell out of favour. Shorn of its traditional metaphysical underpinnings, however, the view has recently been revived by John Kekes, who claims that it is the only plausible explanation for the readily perceived prevalence of both **evil** and altruistic actions. He also claims that it is dualism that justifies the hard reaction to **evil**.

Note again, though, that insofar as dualism is just the conjunction of optimism and pessimism, the theory requires no more recourse to **Evil** to explain **evil** than do the other two theories. Once again, it may be true that some **evil** actions might be caused by **Evil**.

According to dualism, however, **evil** is normally best explained by natural facts about **human** agents' propensities to pursue their own interests and desires at the expense of others, overriding their natural propensities to do good. There is no need to posit agents directly choosing **evil** for the sake of **evil**.

Neither optimism, pessimism, nor dualism, then, necessarily resorts to positing **Evil** in order to explain **evil**. However, the believer in **Evil** will insist that if none of these theories can convincingly explain **evil** without this posit, then it may be that we shall still need to invoke **Evil**. After all, it might be argued, each of the three theories has its own explanatory gap: optimism has to explain the existence of **evil**; pessimism has to explain the existence of good; and dualism has to explain the existence of both good and **evil**.

Of course, each of the theories does attempt an explanation of the phenomenon in question. Optimism, for instance, blames the existence of **evil** on our ignorance or weakness, sometimes compounded by corrupting external social factors. Opponents of optimism, however, deny that this is a plausible reply. Observation of the world around us, they suggest, reveals that countless gratuitously wicked deeds are performed by agents who are fully aware of the moral principles their actions violate, who exhibit no subsequent remorse or regret. Moreover, observation reveals also that corrupting external influences are neither necessary nor sufficient for very many **evil** actions.

Pessimism, on the other hand, has the reverse difficulty to optimism. It has to explain the existence of good, which it does by trying to show that the performance of every good action is somehow in an egoistic rational agent's (long term) self-interest. But opponents of the theory justly complain that this explanation of the huge number of apparently altruistic actions seems wildly

forced. If the dominant propensity in **human nature** is to harm anyone who stands in the way of our own interests, then it is puzzling why so many humans consciously live lives of self-sacrifice wherein they deliberately benefit others at their own expense. Dualists take it as recommendation of their theory that it allows for both selfish and genuinely altruistic actions, since **human nature** is taken to be both good and **evil**. But dualism, as just the conjunction of optimism and pessimism, arguably faces the difficulties of both the other theories. Thus, of every good action it has to explain why, on that particular occasion, the agent's natural propensity to do **evil** did not triumph over her natural propensity to do good; and of every **evil** action it has to explain why, on that particular occasion, the agent's natural propensity to do good did not triumph over her natural propensity to do **evil**.

IV

It is interesting, at this point, to look at the treatment of some of these issues in the Chinese philosophical tradition. After all, general claims about the relation of **evil** to **human nature** are presumably not supposed to be culture-specific. Indeed, in order to make sense of the very notion of **human nature**, we must assume that it is something that is culturally invariant, even if differing cultural circumstances will inevitably affect the precise actualisation of our common natural **human** propensities. Moreover, it is worth subjecting to cross-cultural investigation the claim that the notion of **Evil** is unintelligible outside of some kind of theological context. Are there in fact other cultural traditions that allow the existence of **Evil** without accepting the Western theological assumptions that some suppose to be essential to the concept?

Most importantly of all, however, the Chinese philosophical tradition offers us some intriguingly different varieties of optimism and pessimism about **human nature**, theories which attempt to account for the existence of **evil** without any felt need to appeal to **Evil**. These classical Chinese theories about the relation of **evil** to **human nature** also have some interesting implications for our views about the **nature** of morality.

A familiar story about the history of Chinese philosophy--a story that became part of the tradition's own standard self-representation--tells us that there was an important divide among Confucian philosophers about the relation of **evil** to **human nature**. One position, which became the dominant view, is that **human nature** is good. This was the view of Mencius and, following him, most later neo-Confucians. The other position is that **human nature** is **evil**. This was the view of Xunzi (Hsun Tzu), who exerted a considerable influence on Confucianism in the Han dynasty but who

was thereafter largely ignored until the nineteenth century.

The Chinese philosophers took there to be important socio-political issues at stake in this debate. If, as Mencius claimed, **human nature** is naturally good but corrupted by society and culture, then we need to reorganise our social institutions so as to remove the barriers, thus allowing our natural propensity for good to flourish. On the other hand, if Xunzi is right and **human nature** is naturally **evil**, then we need stringent systems of education and culture to root out our natural **evil** and replace it with good. Unsurprisingly, then, variants on the question "Is **human nature** good or **evil**?" subsequently became popular choices in the state examinations required for entry to office in the Chinese civil administration system.

The two opposed positions here, however, seem to present us with a Confucian problem of **evil** that parallels the structure of something we have already seen. Suppose, on the one hand, that Mencius is correct, and **human nature** is essentially good, but corrupted by society and culture. In that case, since **human nature** is essentially good, how can society and culture, which proceed from **human** beings, be **evil** and corrupting? Suppose, on the other hand, that Xunzi is correct and **human nature** is essentially **evil**, but through education and culture this **evil** can be rooted out and replaced with goodness. In that case, since **human nature** is essentially **evil**, how can society and culture, which proceed from **human nature**, be good?

When we look more closely at the Chinese debate, however, it turns out to be a bit more complex than it might at first have seemed. In the first place, the two opposing positions just mentioned were by no means the only ones held in China. This is clear from one of the most famous passages in the Mencius (5A6), where an interlocutor asks Mencius to elaborate upon his own view that **human nature** is good:

Kao Tzu said, "There is neither good nor bad in **human nature**," but others

say, "**Human nature** can become good or it can become bad.... "Then there are

others who say, "There are those who are good by **nature**, and there are

those who are bad by **nature**.... "Now you say **human nature** is good. Does

this mean all the others are mistaken? (11)

Mencius' reply to this query helps us to understand better the real meaning of his claim that **human nature** is good:

As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of

becoming good.... That is what I mean by good. As for his becoming bad,
that is not the fault of his native endowment. The heart of compassion is
possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of
respect, and the heart of right and wrong. (12)

Mencius' view of the relation between **human nature** and **evil**, then, is roughly as follows. First, he believes that **human** beings can come to know what is moral through an innate moral sense, which has four basic modes: for benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and right and wrong. This claim he supports by appeal to empirical observation: it is the only posit that plausibly explains not only the widespread existence of apparently altruistic behaviour, but also our imaginative concern for the fate of innocent others unconnected with us. Establishing the latter is the point of his famous thought experiment about the child about to fall in the well, awareness of whose imminent fate would naturally move us to feelings of alarm and compassion--though not necessarily action. (13) (Interestingly, Mencius' rather impressionistic defence of the thesis that there is an element of benevolence in **human** beings has some empirical support from modern psychological work.) (14) These four modes of our innate moral sense, however, are also fragile moral capacities, "sprouts" which need careful cultivation and a favourable environment if they are to flourish. When Mencius claims that **human nature** is good, he does not mean that we are innately endowed with a complete and perfect moral sense. Fortunately, though, our **nature** is such that when we act morally and reflect upon what we have done, we feel a special joy, and this joy helps our moral sprouts to grow. Moral self-cultivation can thus lead us away from bad actions, which arise from external conditions. Xunzi rejects most of this. In particular, he denies that we have an innate moral sense, that we naturally enjoy acting morally, and that such joy helps our innate moral sprouts to grow. Instead he claims:

Man's **nature** is **evil**; goodness is the result of conscious activity. The **nature** of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit ...
feelings of envy and hate ... [and] desires of the eyes and ears.... Hence,
any man who follows his **nature** ... will inevitably become involved in
wrangling and strife, will violate the forms and rules of society.... (15)

However, Xunzi's position about the evil of human nature is a bit more elusive than it might seem. (16) Scholars have sometimes characterised him as a kind of Chinese Augustine, holding the view that human nature is Evil. (17) Such an interpretation would, of course, count against the claim that the concept of Evil is only intelligible within a theological context, since Confucianism provides no such context. But it is incorrect to suppose that Xunzi's avowed view that human nature is evil means he thinks human nature is Evil. There is no suggestion in his writings that humans are normally motivated to do evil for the love of evil itself, or that they take any special pleasure in doing evil. (18) Instead, what Xunzi believes is just that we have no innate sense of morality: prior to acquiring a proper moral education, the conflict of our competing natural desires in a world of scarce resources means that chaos and frustration is inevitable. We need to reconstruct our nature through the artificial institution of morality. Fortunately, our base nature can be transmuted, shaped into the proper form much as a craftsman bends crooked wood or sharpens blunt metal. (19)

With a better grasp of what the disagreement between Mencius and Xunzi about human nature amounts to, we can now address the question of how they respond to the Confucian problem of evil posed earlier. It is true that there is a sense in which Mencius both believes in the goodness of human nature and explains the existence of evil in terms of the corrupting influence of human society. But his view is not that human society is corrupting per se; on the contrary, our moral cultivation is also the product of our social environment. Our innate human goodness is just a capacity to become good; utilising our incipient virtuous dispositions, we still need to undertake a process of self-cultivation in order to learn to perform virtuous actions that are unmotivated by selfish desires. But in order to do so, Mencius suggests, we already have to possess incipient virtuous inclinations that can be cultivated to become our strongest motivations.

Mencius freely acknowledges, of course, that humans frequently perform wrong actions. (20) But his explanation that this is because their original good nature has been corrupted is entirely compatible with his theory that human nature is good, provided that the wrongdoer still knows she is doing wrong and feels ashamed of herself. What would be inconsistent with Mencius' theory of human nature would be for a wrongdoer to approve of doing something that she believed to be wrong. But Mencius' internalism rules out this possibility as incoherent, or at least wildly implausible. In this way, like other internalists, Mencius rejects the notion of Evil as a credible explanation of the myriad moral evils we encounter in everyday life.

From his point of view, the only serious challenge to his theory of the goodness of **human nature** is the theory that **human nature** is amoral.

In a certain sense, this is in fact Xunzi's view. Of course, what Xunzi actually says is that **human nature** is **evil**. But by this he means only that our natural desires, if uncultivated, will lead us to act in ways that cause social disorder. This claim is quite compatible with his claim that education and culture, which proceed from **human nature**, can have a morally transforming effect upon us. To be sure, Xunzi believes (against Mencius) that the desire to do good is not original to **human nature**, but is derived from considerations of self-interest. Moreover, as a pessimist about **human nature**, Xunzi is not an internalist in Mencius' fashion: recognising that an action is morally right will not necessarily motivate us to perform it, unless we already realise that acting morally is in our self-interest.

However, Xunzi's pessimism implies, too, that there are good self-interested reasons to be moral. Furthermore, if the social order originally generated by Hobbesian-style considerations of self-interest is to be stable, we also need to internalise these self-interested considerations, to transform our characters through ritual and righteousness so that we come to love good actions in and for themselves. (21) Without such socially mediated character transformation, humans will just continue to act selfishly whenever they think they can get away with it--with disastrous consequences for everyone. Fortunately, though humans are not naturally moral, they are creatures capable of habituation. Indeed it is their natural ability to become habituated to doing good that makes them capable of becoming good--though Xunzi also notes that the possession of this **human** capability is quite compatible with individuals' failure to actualise it. (22)

V

What is the relevance of this brief excursus into Chinese philosophy to our original concerns with **Evil** and **human nature**? Firstly, that both Mencius and Xunzi can offer coherent explanations of **evil** without resorting to the notion of **Evil**, notwithstanding their opposition on the optimism/pessimism issue about **human nature**. Indeed a Western moral philosopher considering these two competing Chinese theories about **human nature** is likely to be more struck by their shared emphasis on the importance of self-cultivation in order to achieve genuine moral action and their mutual optimism that this can be done than by their disagreement about **human nature**. This commonality, of course, is part of what makes them both Confucian philosophers, notwithstanding their differences.

Secondly, our Chinese philosophers' theories about **human nature** also have something relevant to contribute to our broader understanding of morality. This is because how we understand the relation of **evil** to **human nature** importantly affects our view of morality. (23) Pessimists, for instance, view **evil** as natural and look to morality for a way of curbing it; they emphasise the **evil**-avoiding aspect of morality. But critics urge that by seeking to justify morality purely in terms of rational self-interest, pessimism licenses rational agents to violate moral principles whenever they can get away with doing so. Optimists, on the other hand, view **evil** as unnatural and conceive of morality as a liberating force; they emphasise the good-producing aspect of morality. Hence there can be no conflict between self-interest and morality since morality enables us to become what we all want to be. But optimism is often criticised as insufficiently sensitive to our propensities to gratuitous **evil**. Dualists, of course, consider it a recommendation of their theory over its rivals that it can recognise both the **evil**-avoiding and good-producing aspects of morality. But critics reply that it is unclear that such a mixed theory of **human nature** really explains either **evil** or good.

What the Confucian tradition interestingly offers us are two rather different ways of trying to unite the **evil**-avoiding and good-producing aspects of morality, without reverting to dualism about **human nature**. In Western ethics we are more commonly prone to consider these two aspects as presenting competing external and internal perspectives on morality. (24) The external, predictive perspective on moral roles is then associated with the regulative, **evil**-avoiding aspect of morality, and the internal, agent-guiding perspective on moral roles is associated with the good-producing aspect of morality. The Confucian tradition, however, consistently conceives of our relation to morality as a deeply internal one, notwithstanding the differences among Confucian thinkers about the relation of **evil** to **human nature**. Thus according to Mencius' variety of optimism, **evil** is unnatural and morality is liberating because morality allows the development of our innate propensity to take pleasure in doing right. In this sense, morality seems primarily good-producing and obviously has an internal relation to our **human nature**. According to Xunzi's variety of pessimism, on the other hand, **evil** is natural and we need morality to curb our natural inclinations. In this sense, morality seems primarily **evil**-avoiding and has an external relation to **human nature**. But in order for us to successfully curb our desires in the required way, we need to internalise morality using our natural capacity for habituation. Either way, then, what Confucian ethics suggests is that, regardless

of whether we privilege the evil-avoiding or good-producing aspects of morality, the connection between human agents and morality is a deeply internal affair, a connection such that concerns with moral self-cultivation and the minimisation of evil ought to be placed at the centre of human life. Moreover, all this can be done without needing to resort to anything as remarkable as the notion of Evil.

NOTES

- (1.) For more about what might be involved in having such a character see Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and Daniel M. Haybron, "Evil Characters" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1999): 131-48.
- (2.) Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 29. For a fuller account of Augustine's views on evil see G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- (3.) C. Fred Alford, *What Evil Means to Us* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 21.
- (4.) Cf. Ronald D. Milo, *Immorality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), ch. 6; "Virtue, Knowledge and Wickedness" *Social Philosophy and Policy* 15 (1998): 196-215; D. O. Brink, "Externalist Moral Realism" *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, supplement, 24 (1986): 23-41.
- (5.) Cf. David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 140-44; Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), pp. 5-6.
- (6.) See particularly the seminal discussion in Peter Kivy, "Melville's Billy and the Secular Problem of Evil: The Worm in the Bud" *The Monist* 63 (1980): 480-93.
- (7.) The phrase was coined, of course, by Hannah Arendt in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963). However, the current popular understanding of the phrase as tantamount to the denial of evil as a distinctive moral phenomenon may not represent accurately Arendt's own beliefs: see Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 39-41.
- (8.) John Kekes, *Facing Evil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 5-7.
- (9.) Cf. John Kekes, "Understanding Evil" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 13-24.
- (10.) For a modern defence of optimism about evil see Mary Midgely, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).
- (11.) Mencius, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1970), pp. 162-63.

- (12.) Ibid., p. 163. For an interesting comparison of Mencius' and Augustine's views on **evil** see Bryan W. Van Norden, "Mencius and Augustine on **Evil**: A Test Case for Comparative Philosophy" in Bo Mou (ed.), *Two Roads to Wisdom?: Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).
- (13.) Mencius 2A6; *ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
- (14.) See, for instance, Martin L. Hoffman, "Interaction of Affect and Cognition in Empathy": in Carroll E. Izard et al. (eds.), *Emotions, Cognition, and Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).
- (15.) Hsun Tzu, *Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 157.
- (16.) For a sense of some of the variety of recent scholarship on this issue see T. C. Kline, III and Philip J. Ivanhoe (eds.), *Virtue, **Nature**, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000).
- (17.) See especially Homer H. Dubs, "Mencius and Sun-dz on **Human Nature**" *Philosophy East and West* 6 (1965): 213-22.
- (18.) Cf. Philip J. Ivanhoe, "**Human Nature** and Moral Understanding in the Xunzi" in Kline and Ivanhoe (eds.), *Virtue, **Nature**, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, p. 243. Accordingly, Ivanhoe prefers to translate the Chinese xing'e as "**human nature** is bad," rather than as "**human nature** is **evil**." But the latter, more common translation is defensible, provided that we remember that the English term '**evil**' is ambiguous between 'bad' and '**Evil**'.
- (19.) Hsun Tzu, *Basic Writings*, p. 15.
- (20.) Mencius, 6A7; Lau, p. 164.
- (21.) For more on this aspect of Xunzi's thought see David B. Wong, "Xunzi on Moral Motivation" in Kline and Ivanhoe (eds.), *Virtue, **Nature**, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*.
- (22.) Hsun Tzu, *Basic Writings*, pp. 167-68.
- (23.) This theme is emphasised by John Kekes in his "Understanding **Evil**," pp. 21-23 and, more extendedly, in his *Facing **Evil***.
- (24.) Cf. the contrast between internal and external perspectives on moral and legal roles drawn in H. L. A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 86-88. For an interesting discussion of the relation of Confucian debates about morality and **human nature** to external and internal perspectives on morality see A. S. Cua, *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), ch. 6.

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